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ABSTRACT

Since 1990, growing numbers of migrant students have prompted Cobden School District (Illinois) to develop a bilingual education program incorporating native-language instruction for students who speak Spanish, content courses in Spanish, and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes. The Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery is used to determine student placement in the bilingual program. Elementary school students receive language arts and social studies instruction in Spanish, but ESL classes are available only to students with very limited English proficiency. In junior high school, bilingual students receive social studies instruction in Spanish, tutoring, and an ESL class. High school students may take PASS (Portable Assisted Study Sequence) courses--individualized transferable courses that earn credit toward graduation. Begun in 1994, a summer Migrant Education Program provides increased Spanish instructional time and opportunities for students to experience Mexican culture. Mexican exchange teachers have participated in the summer program. Parental concern for education is evident in the many families who have "settled out" from the migrant life. Parent activities are well attended, and migrant parents are becoming more assertive with their questions and concerns. Program problems include a shortage of bilingual staff, the controversial nature of bilingual education, and the widely varying educational and literacy levels of migrant students. Initial benefits are apparent in lowered absenteeism and increased student enthusiasm, participation, and aspirations for the future. (Author/SV)

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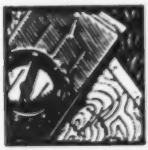
CHAPTER 14



Programming For Success Among Hispanic Migrant Students

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The farms surrounding Cobden, Illinois, have employed seasonal migrant labor for decades but, before 1990, few migrant students attended local schools and services for them were minimal. As the number of migrant students has grown, Cobden School District has developed a quality bilingual education program incorporating native-language instruction for students who speak Spanish, content courses in Spanish, and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes. Begun in 1994, a summer Migrant Education Program provides increased Spanish instructional time and opportunities for students to experience Mexican culture. This chapter provides details on the development of the program; placement and assessment tools; program content at the elementary school, junior high school, and high school levels; instructional materials and strategies; parental involvement; participation of Mexican exchange teachers in the summer program; and program problems and successes.

RC 020538

Establishing Migratory Patterns

Cobden, Illinois, is situated about 330 miles south of Chicago in the fruit-growing hills of southern Illinois. These foothills of the Ozarks are filled with apple, peach, and plum orchards; vineyards; fields of strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries; and a variety of

vegetables that include tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and squash. In order to harvest such an array of produce, much seasonal labor is needed. Few local people are willing to do the work. So, the majority of this agricultural labor is provided by workers who follow the central migrant stream, a pattern of migration beginning in Mexico, Texas, or Florida; passing through southern Illinois; and continuing north to Michigan before returning south each year.

Over the years, the ethnic background of the migrant population coming to Illinois has changed. Many years ago, there were many African American and Anglo American laborers. Since the early 1950s or so, the farm labor migrant population in southern Illinois has consisted primarily of Mexican Americans and Mexicans (Avery, 1995), the latter coming mainly from the state of Michoacán in southeastern Mexico. Many are of Tarascan heritage; some still speaking the language. Others are from the state of Guanajuato in central Mexico. In recent years, they have been joined by workers from the Central American countries of Guatemala and El Salvador (Certificates of Eligibility, 1993-1995).

In our school system, the history of one family with eight children illustrates the pattern of movement to the Cobden region. This family came to Cobden from Cherán, Michoacán, Mexico. As in many other families, the father came first to the United States with his brother. They found work in Texas in 1987 and then continued north to Alabama, North Carolina, and finally southern Illinois. The work they found along the way included cattle ranching, wood cutting, and fruit picking. The orchards near Cobden offered them the opportunity to earn more money than other types of work they had found. In 1990, the mother joined her husband and brought along the youngest daughter. The following year, three sons arrived. And finally in 1992, the entire family of 20 was reunited in southern Illinois. Despite substandard living conditions in a two-bedroom home with no running water, the father's joy was effusive as he spoke about being together again.

During the time this family has been in the Cobden School District, the children have been successful in school, and one graduated from high school in the spring of 1995. Family members have found nonseasonal local employment and become contributing members of the community. They have been able to secure loans from the local bank to purchase cars and a home and have established good credit in the area.

This family and others come to the southern Illinois region for economic opportunities that do not exist for them in Mexico. Most families would prefer to remain in Mexico, but they are unable to find work there. The orchard growers here like the Mexican workers because they work hard and are dependable. Growers in Cobden and other areas need these farmworkers as much as the workers need the growers.

For the winter, Cobden's migrant workers usually return to Arcadia, Florida; McCallen, Texas; or their Mexican hometowns of Cherán, Michoacán, or Salvatierra, Guanajuato. They return to southern Illinois in early spring. The migrant labor camp, where most currently migratory families live, opens the first of April and closes in November.

Previously, the majority of migrant workers were adult males who came to southern Illinois without their families. The Amnesty Act in 1986 (IRCA) allowed many of them to legally bring their families to the United States. This has impacted the schools. An increasing number of families have "settled out," remaining in the Cobden area throughout the entire year. In February 1995, there were 69 migrant students in the district, compared to only 22 students 5 years ago. Many families have bought property in the area or have found living quarters in public housing projects.

Commencement of Program of Instruction

In the fall of 1990, the services provided to migrant students in the Cobden Unit School District were minimal. Students took up space in the classroom but rarely were engaged in learning activities. Some teachers viewed the students as transient and, therefore, not worth spending time with. At this time, there were 55 migrant students in the district in the fall—22 of whom remained during the winter. One classroom was set aside to work with migrant students, but there was no instructional program per se. One teacher and two bilingual noncertified teacher aides were available to help students who came to this classroom. Individual classroom teachers determined whether or not their students needed to be served, but followed no established criteria for sending students to this program. Once students gained minimal conversational skills, they were no longer seen as needing additional instruction.

Some students spent large amounts of time in the migrant room as their regular teachers would send textbooks and assignments for the entire day. Other students would come without assignments or books. Because they were seen as temporary, many students were not even given textbooks for their mainstream classes.

Program Development

In 1990, there was an urgent need to develop an educational program to meet the needs of migrant students, to assess students' language ability upon entry into the program, to provide native-language instruction for those with little or no English proficiency, to offer ESL instruction, and to provide a support system for migrant students in mainstream classrooms.

The State of Illinois mandates a transitional bilingual education program in all school districts that have more than 19 students of the same language background. In addition to ESL instruction, this approach involves the teaching of content areas wholly or partially in the student's home language until skills in English are strong enough that the students can function in the mainstream English-speaking classroom. The current program in the Cobden School District was developed both to meet the mandates of the State of Illinois and to provide a quality educational program for the migrant bilingual student. A crucial part of the program was provision of native-language instruction. The work of researchers such as Cummins (1989), Krashen (1985), Krashen and Biber (1988), and Ovando and Collier (1985) was used to support this approach.

To provide more instruction in native-language skills as well as English, a second teacher and a certified bilingual aide were hired in the fall of 1991. The aide was a former migrant student from the district who had graduated and was studying in the University. Of the two bilingual ESL teachers in the district, one was primarily responsible for kindergarten through sixth grade and the other for junior high and high school. In 1992, an ESL teacher was added to focus on the second-language acquisition needs of students at the grade-school level. An essential part of the bilingual curriculum, this allowed the bilingual instructors to spend more time on native-language instruction.

In 1994, a summer Migrant Education Program was started with the use of Chapter 1 Migrant Education funds. This program extended the students' time in the district to at least 8-9 months. It also increased Spanish instruction time, which was limited during the regular school session. The summer program focused on providing language development and mathematics in the Spanish language to strengthen native-language skills. All teachers, except one, were bilingual.

In addition to the academic program, the summer school gave students the opportunity to explore more fully all aspects of Mexican culture. They were able to experience the music, dance, and art of Mexico and to share their accomplishments with friends and family. It was during this session that a traditional folklóric dance troupe was formed, and local artists provided workshops on mask making and papier-mâché to the students. Recorder lessons were given to all students in grades 4-8. This was a very popular class. It was the first time many students had their own musical instrument and learned to play music. Students also learned to sing typical Mexican songs. For many, it was the first time they had learned words to a song.

Bilingual Assessment Instrument

In addition to a curriculum that met the needs of the students, a plan of assessment and evaluation was developed in the district to make the program accountable. After reviewing various instruments for language proficiency, the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery (Woodcock, 1991) was chosen as the language assessment tool. Every student, whose home language is one other than English, is given this test upon entry to the program and again in the fall of each successive year. Students who fall below the 50th percentile are placed in the bilingual program. Since the district began using this tool in the fall of 1992, only one student has tested above the 50th percentile either initially or at follow-up. This level of performance is an indication of the extreme need of our students, a need that was not being met within the mainstream program of instruction.

In order to track the progress of all students, the district administers the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (1986) in the fall of each year and the Riverside Achievement Test (La Prueba de Realizacion, 1991) in Spanish in the spring. These tests are not used for placement but, rather, to set a baseline to determine whether progress is being made academically.

Alternative assessment measures are used during the summer Migrant Education Program. Journals track students' writing development and gives staff additional insight into students' reaction to their school day and to the various activities. Writing prompts for functional writing are given to students in grades 3-8 at the beginning and end of the summer, and students' essays are scored based on Illinois' Write On program. A math achievement test is given at the end of the summer.

Program Content

In grades K-6, children whose home language is Spanish are taught to read and write in Spanish. Students receive a language arts grade in Spanish in grades K-4 and are taught social studies in Spanish in grades 5-6. Students also attend ESL classes to acquire the English skills necessary to function in mainstream classrooms. Due to staff limitations, the emphasis in ESL is on those students with very limited English proficiency. Students are pulled out of their regular classroom for 30 minutes per day. Individual needs are taken into account in an afternoon tutorial program. Dependent on need, some students are pulled out of their regular classes less than others for tutoring.

The migrant program also works with the Chapter 1 program to identify students who may benefit from reading and mathematics assistance.

At the junior high school, the bilingual students receive instruction in social studies in Spanish, help with regular classroom work during study

hall, and an ESL class. Students with limited English ability struggle through the regular program curriculum. Again, with limited staff, students are not provided first-language instruction in all subject areas. There is still much to be done with the junior high students in terms of additional programming.

High school students are able to take individualized courses in Spanish, mathematics, social studies, science, and health. These PASS (Portable Assisted Study Sequence) courses, which originated in California in 1978, allow students to earn credit towards high school graduation. Each course consists of 10 units. For each unit the student must read the materials, complete the activities, and take a test on the material. After the 10 units are completed, the student receives a full year's credit.

Cobden High School teachers have examined these materials and approved credit for these courses in their subject areas. Spanish language courses are used with students who have little or no English. Students can continue these courses in the summer during the evenings. In addition to these courses in Spanish, ESL is offered at two levels in the high school. With this program and regular courses such as physical education, Spanish language, and art, limited-English-proficient students are able to receive 2 years of high school credit before they plunge completely into an all-English program. Much hard work and assistance is needed for these students to make it through the final 2 years of high school; however, it is being done. In the spring of 1995, two students graduated from this program. Both students began their studies in the district with little English but were able to complete their courses in the regular classroom.

Materials and Strategies for Instruction

In the primary grades, whenever possible, the skills being taught in the Spanish language correspond to those being taught in the mainstream curriculum. It is a goal of the program to work closely with the classroom teacher to coordinate curriculum between the bilingual and the mainstream programs. This has not always been an easy task and there is still much work to be done. The language arts program used in the bilingual curriculum is literature based, taught with a whole language approach. Students read in order to find information and for the sheer enjoyment of reading. This is a program that integrates a variety of language arts skills using many different books, tapes, and posters.

At the kindergarten level, students express their ideas through drawings and the teacher records the commentary given by the child; these drawings and commentaries are saved and put together to form a book. The student may then "read" her/his picture book. They take a great deal of pride in

these books, which also can be used as an assessment tool to show their progress throughout the semester.

A variety of activities accompany readings. When reading the story "The Three Little Pigs," for example, students may construct houses using straw, sticks, and blocks; they also may act out the roles of the pigs and the wolf. With a unit about the circus, the classroom floor may be taped to represent the circus ring and the tight rope, and students can act out the roles of people and animals in the circus. At the same time, vocabulary enhancement and language development are being achieved.

Students at the elementary level also like to express themselves through drawings. Students may work on a mural together. They decide what they want in the mural and then work together over a period of time to complete the task. After the mural is finished, writing assignments may include vocabulary generated by the portrayals on the mural.

Students at this level enjoy learning through music, and it is important to provide plenty of opportunities to sing and listen to songs. After students learn a few songs or finish a mural, the teacher may use a video camera to film their work. Students really enjoy seeing themselves perform.

Students may also role-play by acting out the story of "The Three Bears." Props are used for porridge, chairs, and beds, and each student takes a turn playing the part of Goldilocks or one of the three bears.

Alternative methods of assessment may be necessary with these students. Students with reading difficulties may require oral testing on subject matter content (i.e., social studies}. Students with writing difficulties may compose an essay with the help of a tape recorder and later transcribe their work onto paper.

Awareness of the contributions of minority cultures can be brought into the classroom in many ways. Students may be assigned projects and activities that allow them to demonstrate culture-specific knowledge and skills; special holidays may be honored through discussions, projects, or demonstrations. For example, students may compare Mexico's Day of the Dead to the U.S. Halloween and celebrate the appropriate customs, have a fiesta to celebrate Mexican Independence Day on September 16, make murals about the work in the fields, develop related discussion and writing projects, or write a history of their parents' migration to the United Stated.

In the junior high U.S. history class, opportunities to discuss issues relevant to immigrants to this country, treatment of Native Americans, Spanish influence, or Mexican history can make history come alive for these students. The junior high/high school ESL class at the beginning level emphasizes the vocabulary of everyday situations and school subject areas. In the second course, greater emphasis is placed on reading and writing in the English language. Students are exposed to literature and work on using the English language to express themselves.

Parental Involvement

Over the years, parental involvement has grown. The single greatest indicator of parental concern is the fact that many families have chosen to "settle out" and have bought property in the district or found residence in the public housing projects. They realize the great detriment to their children of moving from school to school. Some families make a tremendous sacrifice to stay in the area, because there are often no jobs available from November to March. They have chosen to stay in the Cobden area, because they are concerned about their children's education. They encourage their children in school and hope that their children's lives will be easier than their own.

For those families who do move away for the winter, getting their children enrolled in school as soon as they return in the spring is their first priority. Students coming from Texas have already been promoted to the next grade in their Texas school, but the parents make sure they are back in school in Illinois, if only for a few weeks.

The school open-house theme in 1993 was "Mexican Heritage." The Mexican mothers prepared and served more than 500 meals to the school community. There were dissatisfied customers when the food ran out. These mothers took great pride in seeing the Cobden natives enjoy their Mexican home cooking.

Parents feel free to come to the classroom with questions or concerns and have become much more vocal and responsive in parent meetings. Parents have supported the program staff and have made their voices known at school board meetings.

Parents are more likely to show up for a parent meeting if there is a planned activity for their children at the same time. Parents do not have child care readily available. During December, a parent meeting was scheduled in conjunction with a Christmas cookie bake and party planned by the high school Spanish Club for the younger children. The turnout was tremendous. The children had a good time, and the parents felt at ease without their children in tow and assured that they were well provided for. The Cobden Spanish Club students loved hosting this event for the children.

Exchange Programs

Two Mexican teachers took part in the summer Migrant Education Program. They were part of a group of teachers who were sponsored by the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores in Mexico to work with Mexican communities in the United States. Both were graduates of the Escuela Superior de Educación Física. One was from Mexico City and the other

from Tijuana. Their contribution was a tremendous benefit to the program. These teachers were extremely adept at working with the students and teaching them about Mexican history and culture. They used role play, storytelling, and games to engage the students in learning activities. They were understanding and keen by being aware to the particular needs of migrant students.

It is hoped that such a program can be continued in the future and that teachers from other Spanish-speaking countries can participate. Teachers in Guatemala have expressed an interest in exploring possibilities for participation, but nothing concrete has developed yet.

Additional Factors to Consider

Needless to say, there are many difficulties in a program such as this. One of the greatest concerns for staff members is the ratio of students to staff. One teacher spends short periods of time with many students. One half hour of native-language instruction and one half hour of ESL instruction are not enough for students who begin school with little or no knowledge of English and with many basic skill deficiencies. Sad to say, money is a factor in hiring additional staff, and administrators' priorities are not always in sync with educational needs of the students.

Along with the these problems, there is the controversial nature of bilingual education in the United States and in the Cobden School District. Some educators, parents, and legislators believe students should be moved into all English classes as quickly as possible. They believe that the more English the students are exposed to, the more quickly and better the students will learn English. Despite research to the contrary, they are firm in this view. Most agree to the need for ESL classes but not to the need for native-language instruction. Many staff members do not understand what the purpose of native-language instruction is or why it is necessary. They do not realize all that is involved in learning another language. Some do not understand the particular needs of migrant students. Much more in-service training for mainstream teachers is needed.

Some migrant parents do not want their children to participate in the program because they want them to "learn English" or they do not want them stigmatized by being separated from the native English-speaking students. More parent education is also needed.

Another difficulty in teaching is the varying educational and literacy levels of the students. Dialects vary depending on whether the student was born and raised in the United States, in a "rancho," or in a "pueblo" in Mexico. Vocabulary and usage depend upon the area from which the child comes. Our experience has shown that children who arrived from Mexico

with a good foundation in Spanish are more successful in learning English than U.S.-born Mexican American children. The task is to enhance their Spanish vocabulary and expose them to literature and other language usage that will develop their abilities in the language.

Despite the difficulties, there have been program successes. Most parents are happy and proud that their children can read and write in Spanish. Receiving instruction in Spanish has given children pride in their language and culture that was lacking in the past. The individualized programs at the high school level in subjects such as health and science in Spanish are very positive. Courses in Mexican history and literature have given students a sense of pride in their heritage and history and have made them more aware of who they are.

The folklóric dance troupe formed during the summer session has subsequently been invited to perform for the Mexican Independence Day celebration in the town square and for the Arts in Celebration Festival. The students were also invited to perform for the International Student Festival at Southern Illinois University and to participate in a dance recital with a local dance instructor. Both students and their parents felt good about this.

Though it will take several years to show the academic success of the program, the socio-psychological benefits seem apparent. Students are enthusiastic about their studies; absenteeism is down; parents participate more in school activities. Students want to be a part of school activities, ask questions about why they are treated in prejudicial ways, and have begun to dream about what they want to do when they grow up. One of our students, a junior in high school, just revealed that he wants to be a bilingual teacher!

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